



THE FIRST DATE

How to prepare for your first appointment

I've heard the first appointment between a client and a lawyer described as a bit like a first date. It's full of anticipation and nerves, and with a mutual hope of long lasting and successful relationships.

In my experience, sometimes these appointments are easy and other times they can be quite difficult.

When preparing to meet with your family lawyer for the first time, I recommend that you take a few moments to sit quietly and write a list of the questions that you hope to have answered in that initial appointment. This will ensure that when you attend at your appointment, important things are not missed.

It is likely that your family lawyer will ask for basic information from you when you attend your initial appointment. It is not expected that you provide a full chronology and detailed inventory of your relationship. Your first appointment with your lawyer should be more about you having any immediate and pressing questions answered, and you ensuring that you can develop a rapport, confidence and trust in the lawyer that you are meeting with.

Do not expect to receive advice from your lawyer in your first appointment as to the exact outcome of your legal dispute. It is a bit like taking your car to the mechanic and asking them to tell you what is wrong, without them opening the bonnet. It is important that your lawyer takes the time to

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gather from you and other sources all of the information that is necessary to provide you with accurate legal advice.

Below is a checklist of information that you should consider preparing prior to your first appointment with your lawyer:

- Basic information about your family including your full names, your date of birth, your former partner's full name and date of birth, the names and dates of birth of any of the children of your relationship, the dates that your relationship began, that you got married, that you separated and the date that your divorce was finalised.
- If you have property issues that need to be resolved, it can be helpful to bring with you a list of your assets, liabilities, superannuation and any other financial resource (something worth money) that you may have at that time.
- Information about you and your partner's income is also helpful.
- It can also be helpful to consider information about any assets, liabilities or superannuation you or your partner had when you first began to live together, and similarly any inheritances, significant financial gifts, large compensation payments (including personal injury and worker's compensation) or any other large sums of money that either of you received outside of your employment throughout the course of your relationship.

You might not have access to this financial information and this will not be a problem in your appointment with your lawyer. Just gather together what information you can. There is no need in an initial appointment to provide bundles of supporting documents. It is simpler for you to attend with a single sheet with bullet points of information.

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If you have children and parenting issues to be resolved, it is likely that your lawyer will want to know information about where the children are living at this time, any special needs that they may have, their ages, routines, the schools that they attend and what your future plans are for your children. For example, where will they go to school. Should there be any change in the arrangements for where they are living or the time they are spending between you and your former spouse.

Also write down a list of any specific concerns you have regarding the children. For example, you may want to go on a holiday and need information about what steps, if any, you should take.

If you have any Court Orders in place or have previously engaged in any legal proceedings and have documents from other lawyers, it would be helpful to take copies of those documents with you to your first appointment.

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